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ABSTRACT

This paper is an explanation of the music of nine ceremonies of the Sioux Indians that are recorded on tape in the Library of Congress. The purpose and description of the ceremonies are given here, as well as an explanation of who is singing the songs, and when they were recorded. Some of the songs included are for the Sun Dance, Braves Dance, Cutting of the Pole for the Sun Dance, and the Opening Prayer of the Sun Dance. There are several other documents about the American Indian in this series. They are: SO 005 548, SO 005 549, and SO 005 545. (OPH)

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SONGS OF THE SIOUX

SONGS OF THE SUN DANCE

The element of physical pain which ennobled this ceremony in the mind of the Indian has overshadowed its significance in the mind of the white man. The Indian endured that pain in fulfillment of a vow made to Wakan tanka (Great Spirit) in time of anxiety or danger, generally when on the warpath. The Sun Dance was held annually by the Sioux, and vows made during the year were fulfilled at that time. Chased-by-Bears, an informant on the subject, told of meeting a hostile Arikaree Indian, far from home. He knew that his life was in danger and prayed to Wakan tanka, saying, "If you will let me kill this man and capture his horse with this lariat, I will give you my flesh at the next Sun Dance." He returned safely and carried the lariat when suspended by the flesh of his right shoulder at the next Sun Dance. Such were the vows of all who took part in the Sun Dance.

This subject was studied and 33 of its songs recorded at Fort Yates on the Standing Rock Reservation in 1911, among the Teton and Yanktonai Sioux. One of the informants was Lone Man who had taken part in the Sun Dance twice and had 100 scars on each arm. He said this was "sacred talk" and "there should be at least 12 persons present so that no disrespect would be shown, and that no young people should be allowed to come from curiosity." Accordingly, 15 men from all parts of the reservation were summoned to discuss the subject. Thirteen had fulfilled vows in the dance, one had fulfilled a similar vow on his way home from war, the gashes being cut by a man who had taken part in the Sun Dance, and the fifteenth man was Mato wata kpe (Charging Bear) a prominent Teton who was best known as John Grass. He was noted as a successful leader of war parties against other tribes, and was the principal speaker for the Sioux tribe in several treaties with the Government. He had been chosen to select the Sun Dance pole but had never made a Sun Dance vow. The subject was discussed in conferences and we visited the place where the final Sun Dance of these bands was held in 1882. The scars were still on the prairie, as on their bodies. They identified the place where the Sun Dance pole had stood, and near it lay a broken buffalo skull that was used in the ceremony.

In addition to these men, about 40 others were interviewed in order to obtain data from persons who had witnessed the dance as well as from those who had taken part in it.

About a month before a Sun Dance, the medicine men prayed for fair weather, singing, burning sweet grass, and offering their pipes to the sky, the earth and the cardinal points. One such song was recorded, Red Bird saying it had come down from Dreamer-of-the-sun who died about 1845. It was said that the oldest men could not remember the falling of rain during a Sun Dance.

The people camped in a great circle, at the time of the dance, and the Sun Dance pole was erected in the middle of this circle. The leading

SONGS OF THE SUN DANCE cont'd.

men belonging to various military societies and these held meeting and danced during the time before the Sun Dance. These were known as Braves' dances.

Densmore, Frances. Teton Sioux Music, Bull. 61, Bureau of American Ethnology. 1918.

SONG OF THE BRAVES' DANCE (Cat. No. 498, No. 6, Bull. 61)

The age of a song can usually be estimated by the number of generations who have sung it. Red Bird, who recorded this song, was a man past middle life and stated that his father said that his grandfather sang it. Thus the song was estimated to be about 180 years old in 1912, when it was recorded. The words were not given.

The cutting of the tree for the Sun Dance pole was an important part of the ceremony. The tree was regarded as an enemy to be conquered. Four young men were chosen to select the tree, and songs of war were sung before their departure. When they had made and reported their choice of a tree, a large number of people went from the camp to witness this part of the ceremony. With the men who had selected the tree were four virgins who were selected to cut down the tree. Each told of a victory by one of her kinsmen, then she wielded the ax and made a feint of cutting the tree. When they had done this, the first virgin cut down the tree in such a manner that it fell toward the south. At this time the following song was sung.

SONG OF CUTTING THE POLE FOR THE SUN DANCE (Cat. No. 451, No. 11, Bull. 61)

The black face-paint mentioned in this song refers to the paint used by a man in the dances which followed his return from war. Usually it covered only the face but a man might paint his entire body if he desired. This song was recorded at Fort Yates, N. D., in 1911, by Siya 'ka one of the few prominent men who are commonly known by their Sioux names.

(words - first rendition)

it'saby	The black face-paint
owa ' le	I seek
Ca he ' camon	Therefore I have done this.

(words - second rendition)

sunka'ka	Horses
owa'le	I seek
ca he' camon	Therefore I have done this.

The pole for the Sun Dance was usually about 35 feet in length and six or eight inches in diameter, and between 30 and 40 men were required to carry it to the camp. The songs at this time were songs of victory. Before being erected the pole was painted with vertical white stripes, and a crossbar "the length of a man" was securely attached to a short branch left for the purpose at the proper height. To the crossbar were fastened the thongs or cords by which the men would be suspended when fulfilling their vows.

OPENING PRAYER OF THE SUN DANCE (Cat. No. 501, No. 21, Bull. 61)

After the opening dance the Intercessor sang the following prayer,

OPENING PRAYER OF THE SUN DANCE cont'd.

all the people listening with reverence. This was recorded by Red Bird at Fort Yates, North Dakota, in 1911. At the age of 24 he took part in the Sun Dance, receiving 100 cuts in his arms in fulfillment of a vow.

(words)

Tunka'sila	Grandfather,
ho uwa'yin kte	A voice I am going to send,
nama'non ye	hear me
maka'sito'mniyan	All over the universe
ho uwa'yin kte	A voice I am going to send.
nama'hon ye	Hear me
tunka'sila	grandfather,
wani'ktelo	I will live,
epe'lo	I have said it.

A man might take part in the Sun Dance in one of six ways, according to the nature of his vow. Even the simplest was a severe test of a man's endurance. The details of the Sun Dance are apart from our present consideration.

Many songs were sung in the great tribal gathering while the Sun Dance was in progress, some being songs of the various war societies.

"BLACK FACE-PAINT HE GRANTS ME" (Cat. No. 503, No. 27, Bull. 61)

Reference has already been made to the black face-paint which was the insignia of a successful warrior. The song was recorded by Red Bird at Fort Yates, North Dakota, in 1911.

"BLACK FACE-PAINT HE GRANTS ME" cont'd.

(words)

Wakan'tanka	Wakan tanka
ce wa'kiya can' na	When I pray to him,
ita'sabye	black face-paint
maku'welo'	he grants me.

"I HAVE CONQUERED THEM" (Cat. No. 484, No. 28, Bull. 61)

This song concerning a victory over an enemy was recorded by Lone Man at Fort Yates, North Dakota, in 1911. One Man recorded 18 songs and was an imformant on all subjects.

(words)

eca''ozu'ye wan he	Well, a war party
ukte'se'celo	which was supported to come
cama'hiyelo'	now is here ---
waka'sota he	I have obliterated every trace of them.

DANCING SONG (Cat. No. 459, No. 35, Bull. 61)

No information was obtained concerning this song which was recorded by Siya ka at Fort Yates, North Dakota, in 1911. The song has no words.

SONG OF THE STICK GAME (Cat. No. 598, Ser. No. 212, Bull. 61)

Guessing the location of a hidden object is the central idea in an important class of Indian games, the hidden object varying in different games. A familiar example is the moccasin game in which four moccasins are placed in a row on the ground with a bullet concealed under each. One

bullet is marked and the object is to locate the marked bullet with as few "guesses" as possible. This song was recorded twice by Gray Hawk, the duplication being accidental. The two renditions are exactly alike, even the pitch being the same. It will be noted that the tempo of the drum is slightly faster than that of the voice. The song has no words and was recorded at Fort Yates, North Dakots.

SONG OF THE STICK GAME (Cat. No. 598, Ser. No. 212, Bull. 61)

A different game of the same class was seen by the writer at a large gathering at Bull Head, in 1912, and is commonly known as the stick game. The objects hidden are two short sticks, easily concealed in the players' hands. Ten players take part in the game, divided into two opposing sides, each with two players appointed to hide the sticks. These players face one another, one pair hiding the sticks while the other pair guesses in which hands the sticks are concealed. The guesses are indicated by certain gestures and the play continues until one side has won all the ten counters. The song has no words and was recorded by Kills-at-night.

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